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THE DRAMA OF THE FILIPINOS.

OF all departments of literature, it is only in the drama that the native Filipino has attained that excellence which consists in vital force and interest. Certainly, if we judged by the effect produced on him and his narrow world, we should have a product of unsurpassed merit. In so far as the plays are concerned, they give a key to the character of the old Filipino, and of the modern one also. What English or American playwright, even in the time of the most serious wars, has succeeded in keeping an audience on its feet, rabid with fury and frenzy, for three hours? What play have we known for the sake of seeing which we would risk a term in prison? Or have we ever been so powerfully impressed that the performance might be said to have been the mainspring of conversion to Christianity? Such influence belongs to the historic drama of the Filipino, and has been so frequently attested, even during the brief time of my own residence in the archipelago, as to require no further proof. The knowledge I have been able to gather has led me to make a classification for the sake of better understanding. Concerning the ancient plays and lyrics, my information has been derived from the older Spanish historians and bibliographers, such as Morga, San Agustín, de Rada, Delgado, de Zúñiga, and, at the present day, Retana. Rizal has contributed his share, but his work is so full of erratic and loose statements as to require caution in the reader.

My classification divides the plays and poems into four classes or periods. These are:—

- (1.) Prehistoric; until 1521.
- (2.) Religious; from 1529 to the present time.
- (3.) Moro-Moro, or Middle Period; from 1750 to about 1876, and to the present day.
- (4.) Seditious, or anti-American; from 1898.

This is the arrangement I have found most satisfactory; although each period overlaps its successor, the facility with which the plays can be studied is greater than with any other division.

I. With respect to the prehistoric time, our knowledge must of necessity be inaccurate and limited. I wish to make it clear at the outset, that my results are here given in the full knowledge that they are in many respects incomplete and faulty, and set forth with the desire that they may be of assistance in clearing up some points, and in stimulating further investigation with fuller material. Centuries ago, the Filipino, while learning the new thought and belief, was forbidden to repeat his heathen tales. This injunction has not been forgotten.

In the early time, it is fair to presume, from circumstantial evidence and the character of the people, that each tribe had beliefs of its own which crystallized into definite traditions, orally handed down in song and story. The Filipino knows little of the soul of music, but has a strong sense of rhythm. In the island of Samar exist songs which, according to native statement, were in vogue before the advent of the Spaniards. From the use of airs for the words of the traditions, the transition was easy to dramatic gesture and action. The native mind quickly responded and the drama was slowly evolved out of the folk-tale. From the Spanish authorities I gather that these old lyrics were used especially to celebrate state occasions. Some were dirges, some festival pieces. According to the famous Jesuit, Padre Colín, most of them "recited the vain deeds of their gods," and the relation of gods to men. Many were of a marine character, owing no doubt to the piracy usual with many of the tribes, and also because the people were fishermen. It is related, whether with authority I know not, that when Legazpi came to Mactan on his conquering expedition, and made a treaty with the natives, a "play" was given to celebrate the fact that Spaniard and Filipino were now "brothers." After the arrival of the Spaniards, these dramatic poems and lyrics seem to have fallen into general disuse.

II. Of the religious plays we have positive information, and manuscript copies may still be seen in certain of the greater museums. In his interesting, though not exact book, Don Vicente Barrantes says that the number of recorded religious dramas, in all the languages, "according to what may be considered as forming the true drama," varies between about twenty-six and forty. The first mentioned bears the date of 1529, and must therefore have been given less than seven years after the discovery of the islands. That the religious plays should have begun so early in the process of civilization is ample proof that the friars used the drama as one of the first means for drawing attention to their religion. For the rest we have the testimony, direct and indirect, of the friars themselves, to show that the priests adopted the religious melodrama as the best way to cultivate Filipino interest. The native saw the grotesque, and to our minds blasphemous, representations of the passion of Christ; his instincts were stirred, and he wished to learn more. More was supplied, and he soon knew also the stories of the saints. I am convinced that the old missionaries of Spain in this manner accomplished more, with greater speed and more lasting results, than has elsewhere been achieved.

The striking feature of dramas of this class is their obvious derivation from the mediæval European ecclesiastical plays. The pantomime and dialogue of the miracle-play expanded, until it grew

sufficiently strong to make its way in the world of laymen. The process thus corresponds to that of the European drama, as excellently set forth by Dr. Brander Matthews.

The religious plays are themselves capable of subdivision, and to my mind the distinction between their varieties is sharp. (a) First may be mentioned plays original with the friars. These were written in Spanish and translated into the native dialects, the actors being the friars themselves, with the assistance of their native students and helpers. (b) Translations from ancient Latin religious plays. These were doubtless of a higher order, as the Latin pieces were better specimens of literature. Such pieces are still popular both in city and province, and may to this day be seen in Manila, the most cosmopolitan city in the archipelago. (c) Plays written in the native dialect by Filipinos. At first, of course, these must have been produced under the eyes of the friars, in the monasteries, but after the insurrections, outsiders adopted the art, and to some extent wrote what they chose. It is true that the government issued a decree forbidding any native to publish or even write anything in any native dialect, but before the plays were produced in the cities they were censored, while in the country the power of Spain was never sufficiently secure to enable the suppression of frequent gatherings. Don Vicente gives dates of such plays¹ to 1882, but, strange to say, does not name a single Filipino playwright.

III. The third class, that of the Moro-Moro plays, affords the most interesting study of the drama, and the character of the Filipino. The name indicates the nature of the pieces. "Moro," according to the colloquial use of the word, signifies any native who is a Moham-medan. The plays, accordingly, recite the struggles between these and the Christian tribes, the former attempting to seduce the latter to Islam, with the alternative of death in various horrible forms. If the Moro-Moro play contained no more, it might be considered a peculiar division of the religious drama. But the plays were filled with fabulous adventures; according to Padre Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga (writing of about 1800).

"In this *loa* they celebrated the naval expeditions of the General (the Spaniard Álava), the honors and titles with which the King had decorated him, and gave him their thanks, in recognition of the favor done them in visiting their pueblo, they being only poor wretches. This *loa* was in verse, composed rhetorically in diffuse style conforming to the Asiatic taste. Therein they did not fail to relate the expeditions of Ulysses, the voyages of Aristotle, the unfortunate death

¹ He gives dates from 1529 to 1580; these were ante-conquest, *i. e.* before the pacification of the islands. Others are dated between 1588 and 1882. All were given in Manila.

of Pliny, and other passages of ancient history, which they love to introduce into their relations. All these passages were full of fables having marvellous qualities; indeed, the more extraordinary the story, the greater their approbation; of Aristotle they said, that not being able to comprehend the profundity of the sea, he threw himself in and was drowned; of Pliny, that he cast himself into Vesuvius in order to understand the fire which burned within the volcano; in this manner they mingle other fictions with history."

Continuing in this description, and going into detail concerning peculiarities of the *loas*, de Zúñiga says of the tragedies: "If these do not possess plenty of personages having high rank and abundance of miracles, with ferocious wild beasts, the people do not like the plays and refuse their attention." This corresponds with statements of other writers, and gives a clear idea of the character of the Moro-Moro plays. It is little over a year ago that I saw the most recent specimen of this class, the so-called opera *Magdapio*, in the Zorilla Theatre of Manila. It was typical in every respect, perfectly illustrating the problems presented by intertribal wars.

In this piece, called "*Magdapio, or Fidelity Rewarded*," by Pedro A. Paterno (score by Carluen), *Magdapio* is a young woman who inhabits a certain mountain of the Itas, which is split apart by the god Lindol (the earthquake), thus letting out *Magdapio*, and exhibiting the riches contained within. The prince of the Itas seeks and obtains her hand in marriage, and the people acquire the vast wealth of the cleft mountain. After the marriage has been celebrated with great pomp, a flight of arrows interferes with the proceedings, an army of foreign invaders, the heathen Malays, rush in, the prince is killed, and *Magdapio* captured. Bay, king of the Malays, asks her to marry him. The girl courageously refuses, whereupon he tells her that she must do so, or he will throw the body of her dead lover into the shark-infested ocean. She refuses, and at the first opportunity throws herself also into the sea, and drifts to the throne of the king of the ocean. The latter inquires her purpose, and she explains. The god tells her that since she has been faithful, she shall be rewarded by receiving the name "*Pearl of the Orient Sea*," in addition to which, presumably, she recovers her lover by order of the sea-king. The tribal wars are clearly shown, even though to occidental eyes the play may be absurd. The music, declared to be "*strictly Filipino*," is strangely reminiscent of "*La Giaconda*," "*Faust*," and other well-known operas, with preludes and intermezzos really original. The performance was given in honor of Governor Wright, and the audience largely American. The play was written in Spanish, and by a friend of the author turned into Tagalog.

Barrantes declares that the date of the Filipino theatre, as a well

organized and patronized institution, is April of 1750. This may be relatively true, but this writer admits that the Jesuit priests in Manila, a century earlier, gave the first recorded play in which religion and war were mingled in a popular manner. This piece, called "Guerras Piraticas de Filipinas," or Pirate Wars in the Philippines, was written by Fray Jerónimo Pérez, and presented in the house of the Order, "where doubtless figured many sons of the country (*i. e.* Spaniards born in the islands) and also pure *indios*" (natives). The date is given as July 5, 1637. Barrantes comments on it in his usual loose fashion: "Here we have the first certain appearance of the theatre in the Philippines, of a modern date indeed, but a century after the conquest, a circumstance destructive of the hypothetical accounts concerning the influence of China on the intellectual evolution of the Filipinos." The first official recognition of the theatre in the archipelago, Don Vicente declares, is made in an order of the Royal Ayuntamiento of Manila dated 1836,¹ even though on the night of January 22, 1772, an eventful night for the government, the governor-general, Don Simon de Anda, gave a great play in the royal palace, or government house, under his own auspices. From this time forth the recognition of plays as a proper form of entertainment was practically conceded. Respecting the date of the first theatre building, it is only known that it was early in the last century. By an order evidently official it was called in 1847 the "Spanish Theatre," and was located in the district known as Binondo, which lies along the water-front, and is the business and Chinese section, being "extramuros."² In 1852 this building was destroyed by an earthquake, and rebuilt in 1853. About 1840 another theatre is supposed to have been built in Tondo, but seems to have been a building intended for other purposes, and remodelled. In 1853 and 1860 two others were erected, respectively in Tondo and Quiapo, both "extramuros" districts. Since that time theatres have flourished.

¹ Art. 116 of the "Cereimonial:" These festivities must always be the choice of our Ayuntamiento, and may include artificial fires, masks, tournaments, or dances in imitation of tournaments, triumphal cars, dances, comedies, bull-baiting and bull-fights, or fights with reed spears in imitation of tournaments, and performances of like nature. Art. 117. This article determines the disposition of scaffoldings and stages which had been erected in the plazas of the towns for representation of the plays; hence it may be inferred that prior to this time no regular playhouse, as such, was in existence. See *The Development of the Drama*, Matthews, chapters on the Mediæval Drama. Scribner, 1903.

² "Extramuros:" Literally, without the walls. The city of Manila, technically, is the small district included within the great wall begun by Legazpi in 1574. At the present time this city, or "Intramuros," is the least important part of the town except that in it is the official seat of government and many of the large educational institutions.

IV. This class, the latest, and the most troublesome for all concerned, contains only seditious plays, which may roughly be divided into two kinds, as sharply distinct as if belonging to different periods. All the plays are directed against the United States government, with the object of rousing the people to take definite action against the "hated interlopers," and once more plunge the country into an insurrection. It is difficult to say which division has been the more harmful. The first includes plays printed in the newspapers, not intended to be produced on a large scale, if at all. The other contains plays seldom or never printed, acted throughout the provinces of Luzon, Samar, and other large islands. In my collection, I have been unable to secure a complete copy of any piece belonging to the first category. These plays appeared in the native newspapers daily as serials. Their verbal form is strange, for the dramas frequently exhibited a mixture of three languages, incoherently blended, presumably with the idea of producing a witty effect, and at the same time deceiving the American secret police.

Of the other type an example is "*Hindi Aco Patay*," that is to say, I Am Not Dead, written by Juan M. Cruz, who signed it with his wife's name. The story is simple. *Karángalan* (Dignity, representing the natural wealth and riches of the islands) is sought in marriage by *Macámcam* (Covetous, the American Government in Manila), and also by *Tángulan* (Defence, a loyal, that is insurgent, native). *Ualáng-hinayán* (Pitiless, native scout under American orders). Her brother has sold himself to Macámcam, and urges his sister to marry the latter. She refuses, having pledged herself to *Tángulan*. Eventually he and Macámcam fight a duel (battle between the American and Filipino forces), and *Tángulan* is left on the field, shot through and mortally wounded. Macámcam sends to Washington for his father *Maĩmbót* (Avaricious, the United States), who comes to see his son married, as it is by his wish that the young man has undertaken to win the girl. Meantime, vague rumors have been bruited about that *Tángulan's* ghost has assumed command of a large force of desperate natives, advancing to destroy the force of Macámcam, and the latter is much disturbed. However, the girl is forced into the marriage, and the ceremony is proceeding, when the funeral procession of *Tángulan* passes the door of *Karángalan's* house. As the catafalque arrives, *Tángulan* springs up, bolo in hand, with the shout: *Hindi aco patay!* The Americans are seized, disarmed, and the lovers united, the play thus ending happily, while Macámcam and Maĩmbót decide to "wait until another day" before attempting again to execute their nefarious plans. The play is skillfully written, and proved a firebrand among the Filipinos. The piece most nearly resembling the older drama is entitled "*Luhang Tagalog*" (Tagalog

Tears), which is in reality a Moro-Moro play and not seditious, although it was suppressed because it stirred up the people, and inspired thoughts of war and treason. In the production of "Hindi Aco Patay" and other plays of like character, several decidedly striking bits of stage business were introduced. For instance, in this and its companion piece, "Kahapon, Ngayon, at Bukas" (Yesterday, To-day, and To-morrow), the costumes of the players were so designed that when at a preconcerted signal they gathered in the apparent confusion in the centre of the stage, and as quickly drifted into separate groups, the insurgent or Filipino flag, for an instant, was distinctly formed from their dresses, the stripes and triangle being clearly defined. The native audience, quick to perceive such a delicate piece of insolence, would cheer itself hoarse, while the foreigners present were unable to see the significance, and wondered what the excitement was about. Occasional attempts are still made to produce similar plays; even within a few months, the Manila papers have chronicled the suppression of a play in one of the provinces near the capital, declared to be as bad as the others, though its effects were of necessity more limited.

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